



A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue 2

Transformational Approaches to the
Roles of Women and Men in Economic Life
and Political Decision-Making

EDITOR
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Japan Center for International Exchange



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Kvinnöorganisationer I Samarbete ry, and Japan Center for International
Exchange
ISBN 4-88907-067-2

Copyediting by Pamela J. Noda
Cover design by Jimmy Low
Typesetting by Noriyuki Patrick Ishiyama
Printed in Singapore by World Scientific Printers (S) Pte Ltd.

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Preface

On September 15-17, 2002, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), and the Finnish Women's Associations for Joint Action (NYTKIS) co-organized the second "A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue" in Tampere, Finland.

In May 2001, the first "A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue—New Visions and Perspectives for Women and Men" was jointly hosted by ASEF and JCIE in Chiba, Japan. The conference signified the first occasion for women and men from the ASEM partners with various backgrounds to openly discuss gender issues from diverse points of view. Recognizing the importance of continuing the Gender Agenda Dialogue, ASEF and JCIE went on to the next phase with the cooperation of NYTKIS.

At the Chiba conference, the participants agreed that in a changing environment the state was no longer the only actor, and the roles of civil society and partnerships among various sectors in facilitating gender mainstreaming of the policymaking process were emphasized. It was determined that in a global age, it is imperative to achieve good governance through a new model of decision-making, especially through the balanced participation of men and women in the process, rather than relying solely on traditional authority structures mainly dominated by men. It was also pointed out that an examination of gender balance in society and the workplace, based on the sharing of information and experiences, was particularly important. Thus, to explore transformational approaches to the roles of women and men in political decision-making and economic life, ASEF, JCIE, and NYTKIS held the second conference in Tampere.

We are pleased to present this summary report for the conference, "A Gender Agenda 2: Asia-Europe Dialogue—Transformational Approaches to the Roles of Women and Men in Economic Life and Political Decision-

Making.” Prior to the Tampere conference, two study groups on women and men as agents of change in political decision-making and economic life were organized, and they reported their findings to the participants of the Tampere conference. The conference brought together 44 women and 13 men from ASEM partners with diverse experiences and expertise to have an in-depth discussion and dialogue on the findings of two study groups, and aimed at producing useful recommendations for ASEM partners, international organizations, civil society, and other concerned parties.

This report consists of an overview, a summary of discussion, and the two study groups’ papers. In the overview, Liz Bavidge, chair of the Steering Committee of this phase and principal consultant of EM Associates in the United Kingdom, gives an overview of the significant factors of the second phase of Gender Agenda, and outlines the important discussions that took place on possible transformational approaches to creating gender balance in political decision-making and economic life. The major thrusts of discussion in each session are presented in the summary of discussion.

This conference was the result of the tireless efforts of the Steering Committee for the second phase of Gender Agenda and the members of the two study groups. We would like to express our thanks to all the members: Liz Bavidge; Ines Alberdi; Ernesto D. Garilao; In-ho Lee; Mikko Lehtonen; Yoriko Meguro; and the representatives of the co-organizers, Arnaud d’Andurain, Sirpa Hertell, and Hideko Katsumata; Azalina Othman, Gabriele Bruns, Antonio P. Contreras, Jouni Mykkänen, and Bong-Scuk Sohn; Wilma Henderikse, Maria das Dores Guerreiro, Maria Liapi, Braema Mathi, and Mayling Oey-Gardiner. We also appreciate very much the help of the assistants to the co-organizers—Geraldine Ang, Caroline Say, Taina Riski, Maikki Lukkala, and Tomoko Suzuki—as well as the rapporteur—Laura Potter—and the editors of this report—Pamela Noda and Chie Kawaguchi.

We also gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the Finnish Government, the Japanese Government, and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

In closing, we would like to thank the participants of the conference for reconfirming our faith in the value of non-governmental policy dialogues on gender issues between Asia and Europe. We believe that this project has provided opportunities for the participants from both regions to examine and confront the common gender obstacles that they face, and we

hope that the momentum produced by both conferences will motivate the participants to undertake new initiatives in their own fields.

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Overview

LIZ BAVIDGE

THE WORLD IS moving forward at great speed in many respects, but the balance between women and men and their opportunity to achieve their full economic and political potential for the good of society and themselves is changing only very slowly.

Conferences and initiatives of the United Nations and the ongoing work of the Commission on the Status of Women have highlighted the situation, and solutions have been proposed. In many cases, solutions have been adopted by governments and pressed for and monitored by women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Yet, the pace of change is so slow in some countries as to be invisible, while in other countries, recession and political upheaval, as well as their backlash, have contributed to progress being reversed.

In holding the second of the Gender Agenda Dialogues, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) with a new partner, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations for Joint Action (NYTKIS), and with support from the Governments of Finland and Japan, created an innovative forum to take a lateral view of this topic. Their vision was to refine and develop the themes of the first dialogue held in Chiba, Japan, in May 2001, which was a unique coming together of key players in Asia and Europe to discuss, disagree on, and develop ideas and strategies.

In this time of increasing unease and suspicion between different parts of the world, it is heartening that such strong links and co-operation could be established. The fact that this dialogue took place is in itself an achievement toward a transformational approach from women and men.

The basic premise of the dialogue was that the status quo needs to be changed. In political decision making at all levels, including the personal and domestic, the voices and perspectives of women are not represented in proportion to their numbers and abilities, while in economic terms, women are the poorer and more disadvantaged people throughout the world. Women and men have the capacity to be agents of change in transforming the status quo and they must work together to do this.

The participants of the second dialogue, like the first, were an invited group of policy makers, policy informers, politicians, NGOs, academics, activists, and experts from the public and private sectors—women and men from Asia and Europe and from a range of backgrounds and professions who were willing to look at common issues in a spirit of openness and co-operation. This was not a conference where politicians talk to politicians and academics talk to academics, but rather was a forum where the public, private, and NGO sectors could talk to and listen to each other.

The reluctance of some men to accept invitations to join the Dialogue (male participants were regrettably in the minority, despite the endeavours of the co-organisers) highlights the problem we were addressing—the role of women and the role of men is still seen at the beginning of the twenty-first century as largely being of interest to women, and in some way less relevant than other issues. Many women have acknowledged that the time has come for women and men to talk to each other about these issues and work co-operatively to achieve change. We also need to be talking to those who do not agree with this viewpoint, and find ways of stimulating them to make a common cause.

The organisers wanted to examine the reasons for the current imbalances so as to offer a means of developing creative ways and concrete strategies to address them. Our starting point was the end of the previous dialogue, and the expert working groups' papers were prepared and circulated in advance so that we could make the most of the experience of the participants from Asia and Europe. The themes were chosen by the steering committee to move the discussion even further forward than at the first conference, and out of a recognition that unless there was a significant shift in the balance in economic and political life, the status quo would remain. Women and men having a political voice and being economically independent are pre-requisites for good governance.

Some participants were concerned that one of the negative effects of globalisation—the trafficking of women and girls—was not featured in the background papers. The steering committee, in clarification, explained

that they recognised and shared the concern about this topic but considered that it was too important to be a small strand in this dialogue, and deserved to be treated on its own. It was suggested that globalisation might be the theme of a third Gender Agenda Dialogue in the future.

The dialogue was built on two stepping stones—the Chiba conference and the documents from that, and the papers produced by the expert working groups. The papers were a jumping off point to inform, set the context, and provoke and stimulate the discussions. We did not want to use the time together to produce statistics and theories; we wanted to use the synergy of the groups to release creativity and identify what we could learn from each other.

It would be simplistic to believe that Europe leads the way in changing the balance of society, and in the opening session we heard from Kaarina Dromberg, Finnish minister of culture, that despite equal division of labour in work, family, and politics being the goal of the Finnish model, and although Finland is regarded as a leading exponent of this in Europe, even in Finland there seems to be an impenetrable glass ceiling preventing women from achieving high governmental posts and equal pay for equal work.

Musa bin Hitam, former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, pointed out that countries in Asia shared underlying common values represented by the great religions of the world, and that though modernisation is under way, the challenges of development of the poorest countries, such as Bangladesh, Laos, and Afghanistan, and the wealthiest, such as Japan, require the most effective use of human resources. He said that full participation and full representation is needed to move forward and contribute to overall development.

In the history of modern Asia, women have played a crucial part in the political and social changes that led to general economic changes. The role of men in this has been more recognised, documented, and accepted, while women's roles have been ignored and marginalised. Development and progress in Asia has led to the empowerment of women, which has led to the demand for recognition and equality in opportunities. Despite the important roles played by women as heads of state, much remains to be done to create a strategised plan to develop a gender agenda in education, business, and politics.

Musa bin Hitam raised the question of what would constitute “good” gender balance. He felt that this is more than merely a question of numbers, and stressed that men must be convinced that good governance means

equality and human rights. The mindset of leaders who rely on traditions and culture must be dismantled so that the necessary changes and challenges to human rights, including gender inequalities, can be made.

So, what can be done to change these mindsets? We can harness the energy of the participants and their many contacts, and one of the outcomes of the dialogue was the challenge to all to take actions and build support where they are. As was pointed out, many of the suggestions are already being carried out, though not everywhere and not consistently. We should start with the richness we have and look to add value.

It was agreed that monitoring and developing effective compliance mechanisms would be key to achieving change, and that it is up to the individual as well as governments and international bodies to take steps toward this.

The responses to the final challenge by Yoriko Meguro to the closing plenary session—to identify what recommendations for change are concretely attainable in each participant's context—were inspiring. For example: several Indonesian participants were committed to developing a support system for women in decision-making in their country, especially before the forthcoming election; one participant from South Korea wished to formulate some sort of 40/40 quota system as an affirmative action programme to protect men and women in the recruitment policies in publicly funded posts; a participant from Thailand wanted to develop the idea of mentoring in business and to monitor the number of female politicians and their record in regard to gender issues; and a participant from Germany recognised the importance of involving men in the gender dialogue. Participants gained information, enthusiasm, another way of looking at the gender agenda, and unexpected and fruitful links between each other.

This was not a UN conference with agreed conclusions and commitments from governments, with carefully worded statements. It is a living dialogue that energised the participants and brought forth new visions and perspectives.

Summary of Discussion

THE FOLLOWING IS A digest of discussions in working group session one on economic life and working group session two on political decision-making. For each of these topics, participants were sub-divided into three discussion groups.

WOMEN AND MEN IN ECONOMIC LIFE

The three discussion groups agreed that the situation for women and men in each country is different and also different within each country. Furthermore, no country has a monopoly on good practise in tackling inequality, and even countries with a long track record of achievement in economic equality between women and men acknowledged a pay gap. These discussions highlighted how much there is to be learned from each other and that the perception that Europe has been leading the way is false. We should document models of social entrepreneurship and learn from a SWOT analysis of them. There needs to be benchmarking between countries and between companies and entrepreneurs within countries about social attitudes, flexible working, and women in senior decision-making positions. The groups recognised that the time is right for a new dialogue between women and men and for creative and transformational approaches.

Why does inequality in the economic roles of women and men exist? It is produced by a range of cultural and structural factors as well as historical patterns, including the education level of women and men and access to credit. Traditional values were also cited as significant factors in creating economic imbalance.

All groups recognised that globalisation, which had brought new opportunities to some groups and a freeing of traditional structures and patterns of work, had also had a negative social impact, as seen in the trafficking of women and children and the abuse of domestic servants and migrant workers. Not the central theme of this Gender Agenda Dialogue, globalisation was discussed as part of the context for a transformational approach to women and men in economic life. Participants recognised that these abuses need to be addressed internationally through crime control and measures to alleviate poverty, and suggested that globalisation may be a topic for a future dialogue.

The groups addressed the factors that have contributed to the imbalances that currently exist. One key factor is the high level of unpaid work done by women. This was difficult to quantify, however, as there is no universal set of international indicators of gender equality in economic life. We need to have more sophisticated qualitative and quantitative data to clarify the situation and identify creative ways of defining the work of women and men. Examples were given of satellite accounts in European countries to quantify the unpaid work of women in particular, but it was also pointed out that this approach may have a negative effect on the situation of countries receiving international aid because it would enhance their gross domestic product and result in pressure to reduce their aid. Perhaps there should be an international forum to identify and disseminate relevant gender disaggregated statistics. This could lead to benchmarking the results and policies in achieving equality between Asia and Europe.

What is work? Is it full-time paid work outside the home? What is the significance of part-time work? What about the work of women and men in rural areas who work on the land and may not have access to money? What is the status of the work of caregivers for children and the elderly, and household managers? The majority of workers in these latter categories seem to be women, so does this contribute to the attitude of society to this work? Would more men prefer to work fewer hours and have time to be involved in caring for children and the elderly?

Gender Identity, Cultural Representation, and Practices

There was general agreement that an innovative approach to this is required—even a suggestion that there could be a movement to liberate men from the burden of the “rice-winner” or “breadwinner” role. It might

be possible to find creative ways of releasing men from this role, and seeking gender balance in this role would have an impact on other roles of caring and domestic work.

In the participants' countries, it was mainly the situation that women have the responsibility for domestic and caring tasks and concerns, and that if this work is paid at all, it is paid badly and regarded as of little value. The groups acknowledged that it seems to be true worldwide that if the work is done by women it is not valued highly and if the work is done by men it is valued highly.

There was discussion on creative ways of spreading the costs of caring, childbearing, and childrearing throughout society that would be to the ultimate benefit of society. We heard of parts of China where the cost of childcare is shared equally between the employer of the mother and the employer of the father. In Finland, the focus is on the right of the child to care services up to the age of five. These shifts of focus and emphasis seemed to the groups to begin to shift the mindset, which has traditionally claimed that it is the job of the father to earn the money and the job of the mother to look after the household and children.

Educational and Attitudinal Change

Does the education system reinforce traditional stereotypical roles and attitudes?

While there are serious attempts to create and support gender neutral formal education systems, some of the smallest children in many European and Asian countries still express stereotypical attitudes.

The groups considered that formal and informal education should encourage non-traditional skills and professions for girls and boys and discourage gender stereotyping. Gender balance should be promoted from the earliest age. There should be an obligation of existing family welfare agencies and institutions to develop training programmes for parents and carers so as to socialise children in a gender-equal manner. We need to focus on the younger generation, because it takes up to three generations to change attitudes.

Promotion of Assertiveness and Self-confidence among Women and Girls

Attitudinal changes are linked with the promotion of self-esteem and

assertiveness among women and girls. It is important to stress that the groups were not trying to depress the situation of boys and men, but to support the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups and raise the status of all. There is evidence to suggest that if girls are educated and develop confidence, the economic viability of communities is enhanced.

Open Dialogue between Women's, Men's, and Gender Studies

This led to discussion about the separate nature of women's, gender, and men's studies. Participants recognised how unusual it was that one of the male participants leads a gender studies course in the Philippines, and how fruitful it would be for there to be an open dialogue between these groups to create synergy and innovation.

Incentives to Media

These groups identified some key players in achieving change—the media, firms and corporations, civil society, institutions, and policy makers. In this dialogue, the groups tried to identify incentives to these actors to work to achieve economic balance:

- An award to advertising agencies that promote positive images of women and girls. This idea came from the accounts of how the media treats women in their images and stories. It was generally acknowledged that the personal attributes and lifestyle of women was the subject of critical comment in the media. We heard in the opening presentation of a company in the Netherlands that encouraged men to take up domestic tasks through a series of Internet-based scenarios with entertaining story lines. Women were encouraged to send the hyperlink to men in their lives.
- An award to the best women entrepreneurs, managers, and grass-roots leaders who introduce innovative methods to enhance women's position in economic life. Their profile would be raised nationally and internationally and this would have the added and valuable effect of creating role models.

Incentives to Firms and Corporations

- We should learn from the model of the “green” movement and encourage firms and corporations to develop a gender-friendly approach, on

the basis that this approach makes sound commercial sense. We heard of firms that have realised that it is very expensive to recruit and train staff, so if they offer very flexible working hours and contracts to staff (in this instance the majority of the staff were women), they would give women a more acceptable working life and save money at the same time. Selling points need to be developed to convince firms that gender-friendly policies can be economic. Some women's groups have bought one or two shares in public companies to entitle them to attend shareholders' meetings and ask questions about their gender policies.

- Wealthy women should achieve change by deciding to buy shares only in companies with positive actions in relation to the employment of women.

Developing Women's Entrepreneurship

Developing women's entrepreneurship was also seen as a key factor in addressing the imbalances in the economic life of women and men. This would require the removal of the gender-based barriers, which are identified as legal, economic, social, and cultural. The groups heard of experiences from around the world of women's lack of rights to own property and to inherit. There were examples of no access to finance and financial institutions and an acknowledgement that in parts of Europe it is not that long ago that a woman had to have a man's permission to have a bank account. The groups agreed that unsupportive and sceptical attitudes toward women entrepreneurs are still prevalent among decision makers in business, banks, and suppliers, and among customers.

At the same time, there was a recognition that globalisation has also brought negative aspects, such as trafficking in women and girls and the abuse of migrant workers. It was noted that women in poor rural and urban areas are not truly entrepreneurs, but are actually employees in the informal sector. There is a misunderstanding that home-based employment is self-employment, where it may actually be wage employment disguised.

We heard of the Portuguese experience of women creating small businesses providing the domestic services that busy working couples need, and gaining accreditation and recognition for this work.